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# UV synchrotron radiation linear dichroism spectroscopy of the anti-psoriatic drug anthralin

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## ABSTRACT

Anthralin (1,8-dihydroxyanthrone, 1,8-dihydroxy-9(10*H*)-anthracenone), also known as dithranol and cignolin, is one of the most efficient drugs in the treatment of psoriasis and other skin diseases. The precise mode of biochemical action is not fully understood, but the activity of the drug is increased by the influence of UV radiation. In the present investigation, the UV absorption of anthralin is studied by synchrotron radiation linear dichroism (SRLD) spectroscopy on molecular samples partially aligned in stretched polyethylene, covering the near and vacuum UV regions with wavenumbers ranging from 23,000 to 58,000 cm<sup>-1</sup> (430–170 nm). The observed polarization spectra are well predicted by quantum chemical calculations using time-dependent density functional theory (TD-DFT). About a dozen spectral features are assigned to computed electronic transitions. The calculations support interpretation of the anomalous fluorescence of anthralin as a result of barrier-less excited state intramolecular proton transfer (ESIPT) to the tautomer 8,9-dihydroxy-1(10*H*)-anthracenone.

**Subjects** Spectroscopy, Theoretical and Computational Chemistry, Photochemistry, Physical Chemistry

**Keywords** Anthralin, Electronic transitions, Polarization spectroscopy, Linear dichroism (LD), Excited state intramolecular proton transfer (ESIPT), Synchrotron radiation, Time-dependent density functional theory (TD-DFT)

## INTRODUCTION

For more than 100 years anthralin (A), also known as dithranol and cignolin, has been applied as an effective topical agent for the treatment of the skin disease psoriasis (*Ashton et al., 1983; Van de Kerkhof, 1991; Sehgal, Verma & Khurana, 2014; Körber et al., 2019*). The compound was for many years believed to be anthracene-1,8,9-triol, but spectroscopic and crystallographic analyses indicated that the prevailing constitution is that of the tautomer 1,8-dihydroxy-9(10*H*)-anthracenone (*Hellier & Whitefield, 1967; Avdovich & Neville, 1980; Ahmed, 1980*), see Fig. 1. A is a reactive compound characterized by complicated red-ox properties (*Czerwinska et al., 2006; Pshenichnyuk & Komolov, 2014*) and it exhibits anomalous fluorescence with a Stokes shift of 10,500 cm<sup>-1</sup>, indicating large rearrangement in the excited state (*Møller et al., 1998*). The precise mode of biochemical action is not fully understood, but the application of UV radiation is known to increase

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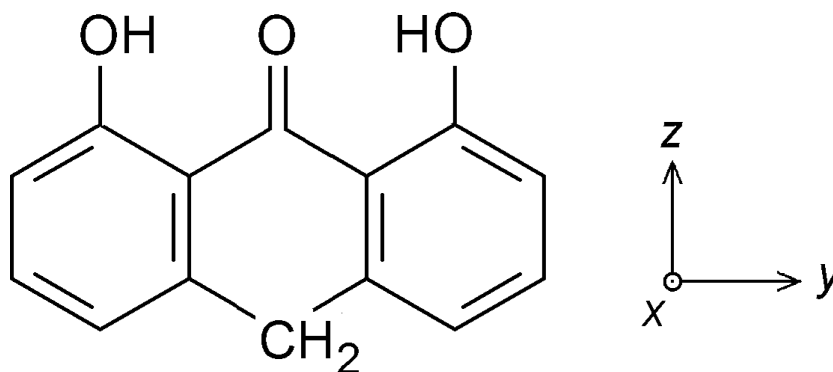
Additional Information and  
Declarations can be found on  
page 11

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**Figure 1** Anthralin (A) with definition of the molecular coordinate system.

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the activity of the drug (Lapolla *et al.*, 2011). Bally and coworkers (Czerwinska *et al.*, 2006) and Pshenichnyuk & Komolov (2014) thus considered the involvement of excited electronic states generated by UV irradiation.

In the present work, we investigate the excited states of A by synchrotron radiation linear dichroism (SRLD) UV spectroscopy on molecular samples partially aligned in stretched low-density polyethylene (PE). The use of synchrotron radiation (Miles *et al.*, 2007; Miles *et al.*, 2008) provides increased signal-to-noise ratio in the UV region and enables a significant expansion of the accessible spectral range, compared with the use of a traditional light source (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018; Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). In the present study, the measurement is extended into the vacuum UV, covering the region up to  $58,000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (170 nm); this is an extension of the previously investigated range by about  $11,000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (1.4 eV) (Andersen & Spanget-Larsen, 1997). Linear dichroism (LD) spectroscopy yields experimental information on the molecular transition moment directions of the observed absorption bands (Michl & Thulstrup, 1986; Thulstrup & Michl, 1989; Rodger & Nordén, 1997; Nordén, Rodger & Dafforn, 2010). The observed spectra are discussed with reference to the results of time-dependent density functional theory (TD-DFT) calculations (Marques *et al.*, 2012; Foresman & Frisch, 2015). Additional information is provided as Supplemental Files.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

### Sample preparation

A sample of A (CAS No. 1143-38-0) was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich and purified by column chromatography as previously described (Andersen & Spanget-Larsen, 1997). The near-UV absorbance spectrum of the purified substance in *n*-heptane solution (Merck Uvasol) is shown in Fig. S1. Low-density polyethylene (PE) 100  $\mu\text{m}$  sheet material was obtained from Hinnum Plast A/S. A  $2.5 \times 6\text{ cm}$  PE piece cut from the sheet was purified by extraction with chloroform (Merck Uvasol) at  $50\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$  for one day. A was introduced by submersion of the dried PE sample into a saturated chloroform solution of the substance in a sealed container at room temperature for three days. After evaporation of the chloroform

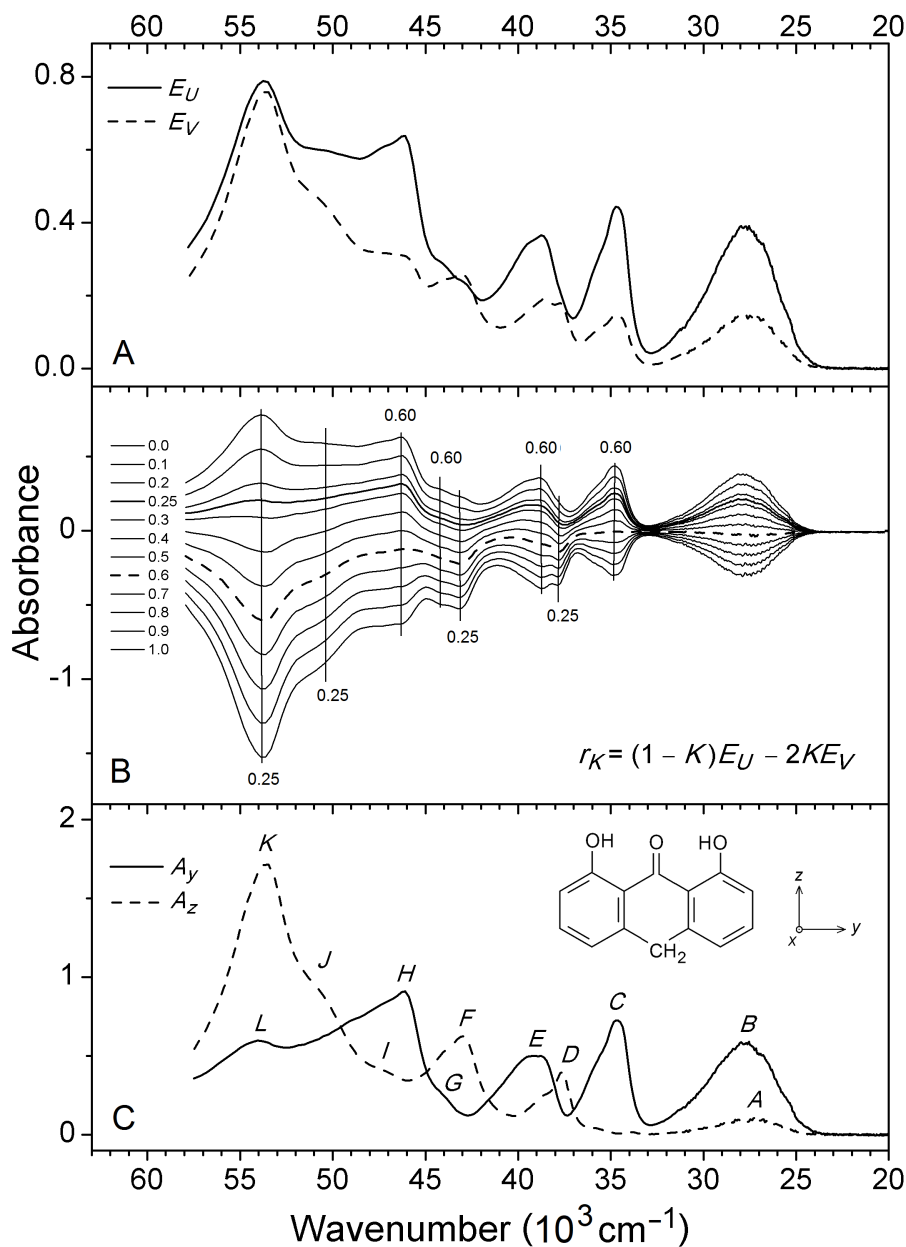
from the doped sample, the surface was cleaned with ethanol (Merck Uvasol) to remove crystalline deposits. The PE sample was finally uniaxially stretched by 500%. A sample without solute was produced in the same manner for use as a reference. Further details on stretched polyethylene samples can be found in the literature ([Michl & Thulstrup, 1986](#); [Thulstrup & Michl, 1989](#)).

### Linear dichroism (LD) spectroscopy

LD spectra in the range 31,300–20,000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (320–500 nm) were recorded on a UV-2101PC Shimadzu spectrophotometer at Roskilde University. SRLD spectra were measured in the range 58,000–31,300  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (170–320 nm) on the CD1 beamline ([Miles et al., 2007](#); [Miles et al., 2008](#)) at the storage ring ASTRID at the Centre for Storage Ring Facilities (ISA). As previously described ([Andersen & Spanget-Larsen, 1997](#); [Nguyen et al., 2018](#); [Nguyen et al., 2019](#)), two absorbance curves were recorded at room temperature with the electric vector of the sample beam parallel ( $U$ ) and perpendicular ( $V$ ) to the stretching direction of the PE sample. The observed baseline-corrected LD absorbance curves  $E_U(\bar{\nu})$  and  $E_V(\bar{\nu})$  are shown in [Fig. 2A](#). The isotropic absorbance curve  $A_{\text{ISO}}(\bar{\nu}) = E_U(\bar{\nu}) + 2E_V(\bar{\nu})$  is shown in [Fig. S2](#).

### Calculations

Quantum chemical calculations considering isolated molecules in the gas phase were performed by using the Gaussian16 software package ([Frisch et al., 2016](#)). Optimizations of molecular geometry were performed with B3LYP ([Becke, 1993](#); [Lee, Yang & Parr, 1988](#)). This DFT was found to be very successful in the prediction of molecular and vibrational structures of compounds like **A** with intramolecular  $\text{C}=\text{O} \cdots \text{HO}$  hydrogen bonding ([Spanget-Larsen, Hansen & Hansen, 2011](#); [Hansen & Spanget-Larsen, 2012](#)). Geometry optimizations for the ground state ( $S_0$ ) and the lowest excited singlet state ( $S_1$ ) of **A** were carried out with B3LYP and TD-B3LYP, respectively, using the 6-31+G(d,p) basis set ([Foresman & Frisch, 2015](#); [Frisch et al., 2016](#)). Vertical electronic transitions from the ground state to the 60 lowest excited singlet states were computed with TD-CAM-B3LYP ([Yanai, Tew & Handy, 2004](#)) and the basis set aug-cc-pVTZ ([Dunning Jr, 1989](#); [Kendall, Dunning Jr & Harrison, 1992](#)). We recently found that this long-range corrected procedure is adequate in the prediction of electronic transitions of aromatic chromophores in the near and vacuum UV regions ([Nguyen et al., 2018](#); [Nguyen et al., 2019](#)). A constant term was subtracted from the excitation wavenumbers calculated with TD-CAM-B3LYP in order to facilitate comparison with the observed spectra ([Grimme, 2004](#); [Nguyen et al., 2018](#); [Nguyen et al., 2019](#)); an empirical correction of 3,500  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  was found to be adequate in the present case. The main predicted transitions are listed in [Table 1](#) together with the observed ones. A complete listing of the calculated transitions is provided as [Data S1](#). Graphical representations of transitions to  $^1A_1$  and  $^1B_2$  states are shown in [Fig. 3](#). Gaussian convolutions considering all allowed transitions are provided as [Fig. S3](#), using previously described procedures ([Serr & O'Boyle, 2009](#); [Nguyen et al., 2019](#)). Detailed results for the ESIPT photoproduct 8,9-dihydroxy-1(10H)-anthracenone are given in [Data S2](#), results for additional excited state configurations are outlined in [Fig. S4](#).



**Figure 2** Observed SRLD absorbance curves. (A) Absorbance curves  $E_U$  and  $E_V$  for anthralin (A) partially aligned in uniaxially stretched polyethylene, indicating absorbance measured with linearly polarized radiation with electric vector parallel and perpendicular, respectively, to the stretching direction  $U$  of the polymer. (B) Family of reduced absorbance curves  $r_K$  according to Eq. (2) with  $K$  varying from 0.0 to 1.0 in steps of 0.1. Orientation factors  $K$  determined for prominent features are indicated. (C) Partial absorbance curves  $A_y$  and  $A_z$  according to Eq. (3) corresponding to absorbance polarized along the molecular axes  $y$  and  $z$ , see text.

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**Table 1** Observed features of the SRLD spectrum of anthralin (A) and theoretical electronic transitions predicted with TD-CAM-B3LYP/aug-cc-pVTZ.

Observed				TD-CAM-B3LYP <sup>a</sup>			
	$\tilde{\nu}^b$	Abs <sup>c</sup>	Pol <sup>d</sup>	Term	$\tilde{\nu}^{b,e}$	$f^f$	Leading configurations <sup>g</sup>
A	27.3	0.11	z	2 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	27.9	0.03	93% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
B	27.7	0.58	y	1 <sup>1</sup> B <sub>2</sub>	27.7	0.29	94% [4a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
C	34.6	0.73	y	2 <sup>1</sup> B <sub>2</sub>	34.6	0.08	79% [3a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 13% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 5a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
D	37.6	0.39	z	3 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	38.6	0.03	73% [5b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 13% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
E	39.2	0.50	y	3 <sup>1</sup> B <sub>2</sub>	40.9	0.18	54% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 5a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 17% [3a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
F	42.9	0.62	z	5 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	43.2	0.23	56% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 21% [5b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
G	44	(0.2)	y	4 <sup>1</sup> B <sub>2</sub>	43.5	0.03	55% [4a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 23% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 6a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
H	46.1	0.91	y	5 <sup>1</sup> B <sub>2</sub>	47.4	0.52	29% [3a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 19% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 6a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
I	47	(0.4)	z	7 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	50.9	0.06	43% [6b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 9b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 16% [5b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
J	51	(1.0)	z	8 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	52.1	0.17	21% [5b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 19% [4b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
K	53.4	1.72	z	9 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	52.8	0.41	53% [4a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 6a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 30% [3a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 5a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
				10 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	55.3	0.09	66% [4b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 12% [5b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
				12 <sup>1</sup> A <sub>1</sub>	57.9	0.08	54% [3a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 6a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 29% [5b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
				8 <sup>1</sup> B <sub>2</sub>	52.5	0.16	34% [3a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 8b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 29% [5b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 5a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )]
L	54.1	0.60	y	9 <sup>1</sup> B <sub>2</sub>	56.3	0.14	50% [2a <sub>2</sub> ( $\pi$ ) → 7b <sub>1</sub> ( $\pi^*$ )], 12% [22b <sub>2</sub> ( $\sigma$ ) → 30a <sub>1</sub> ( $\sigma^*$ )]

**Notes.**

<sup>a</sup>Main transitions only. Complete list of calculated transitions provided as [Data S1](#).

<sup>b</sup>Peak wavenumber in 1,000 cm<sup>-1</sup>.

<sup>c</sup>Peak absorbance estimated from the partial absorbance curves in [Fig. 2C](#). Entries in parentheses indicate diffuse shoulders.

<sup>d</sup>Polarization direction.

<sup>e</sup>An empirical correction of 3,500 cm<sup>-1</sup> has been subtracted from the calculated wavenumber.

<sup>f</sup>Oscillator strength.

<sup>g</sup>MO energies and diagrams in [Fig. 4](#).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

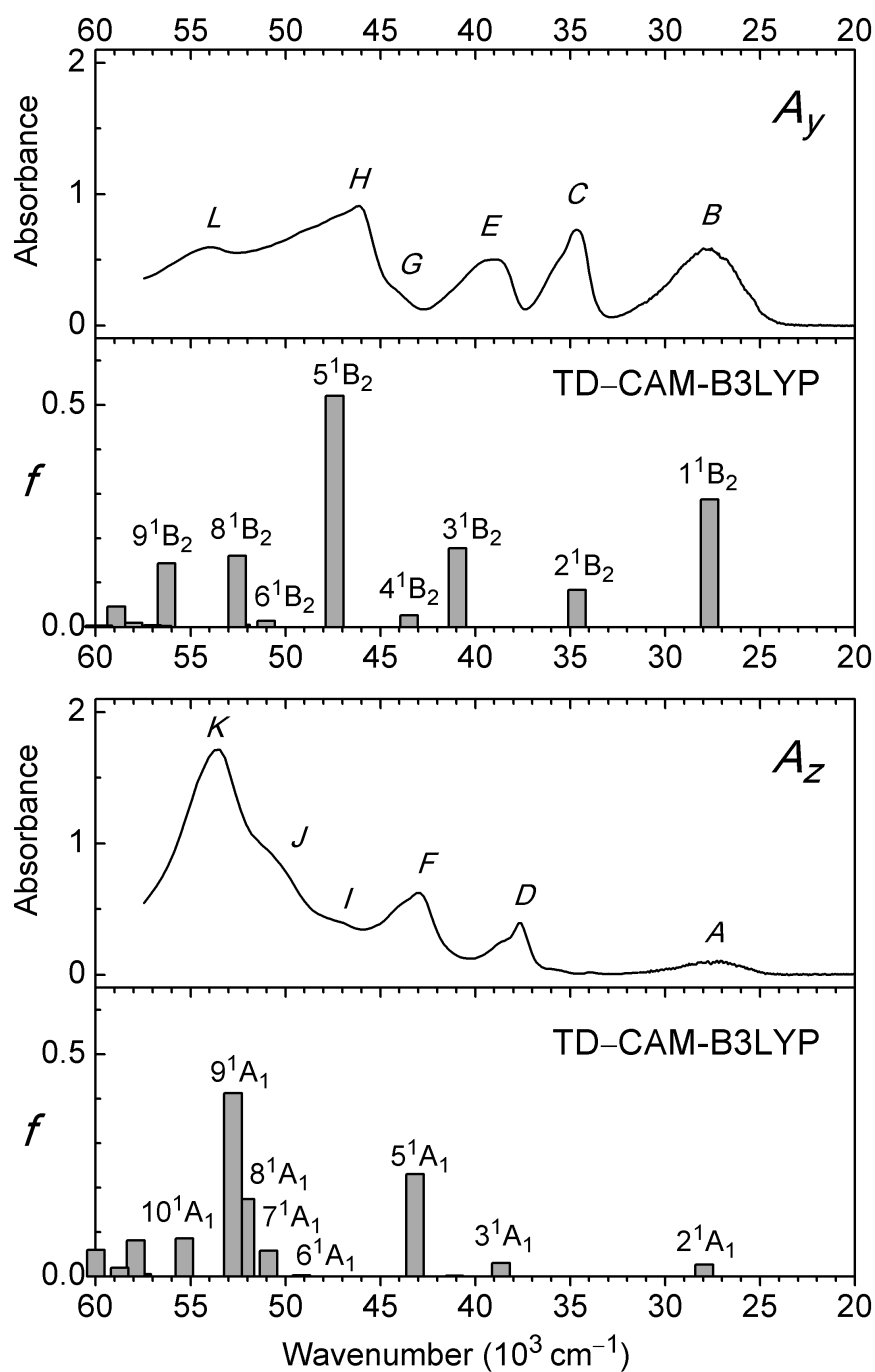
### Linear dichroism: orientation factors and partial absorbance curves

The observed SRLD absorption curves  $E_U(\tilde{\nu})$  and  $E_V(\tilde{\nu})$  for **A** partially aligned in stretched PE are shown in [Fig. 2A](#). The directional information that can be extracted from these curves is represented by the orientation factors  $K_i$  for the molecular transition moment vectors  $\vec{M}_i$  of the observed spectroscopic features  $i$  ([Michl & Thulstrup, 1986](#); [Thulstrup & Michl, 1989](#)):

$$K_i = \left\langle \cos^2 \left( \vec{M}_i, U \right) \right\rangle. \quad (1)$$

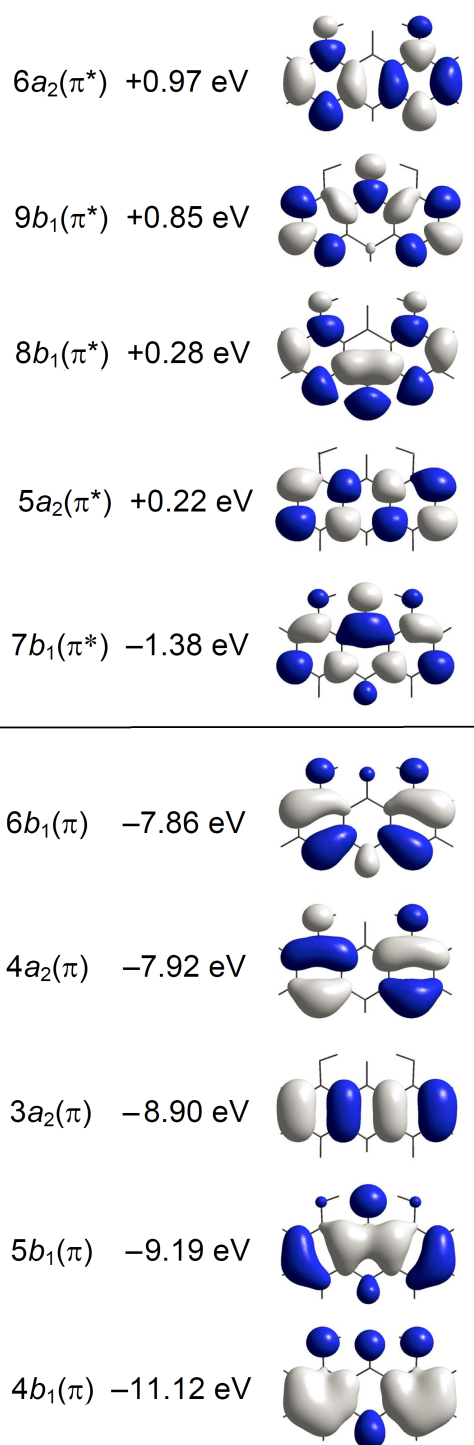
The orientation factor is defined as an average over all solute molecules in the light path, indicated by the pointed brackets in [Eq. \(1\)](#), where  $\left( \vec{M}_i, U \right)$  is the angle of the moment vector of transition  $i$  with the polymer stretching direction,  $U$ . The  $K_i$  values may be determined by the graphical TEM procedure ([Michl & Thulstrup, 1986](#); [Thulstrup & Michl, 1989](#)) which involves construction of linear combinations of  $E_U(\tilde{\nu})$  and  $E_V(\tilde{\nu})$ . In the present application we consider the reduced absorbance curves  $r_K(\tilde{\nu})$  ([Madsen et al., 1992](#)):

$$r_K(\tilde{\nu}) = (1 - K)E_U(\tilde{\nu}) - 2KE_V(\tilde{\nu}). \quad (2)$$



**Figure 3** Partial absorbance curves  $A_y$  and  $A_z$  for anthralin (A) and electronic transitions to excited  $^1B_2$  and  $^1A_1$  states predicted with TD-CAM-B3LYP/aug-cc-pVTZ.

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**Figure 4** Energies and amplitude diagrams for the five highest occupied and five lowest unoccupied  $\pi$  type MOs of anthralin (A) computed with CAM-B3LYP/aug-cc-pVTZ. Different colors indicate amplitudes of different sign.

Full-size DOI: [10.7717/peerjchem.5/fig-4](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerjchem.5/fig-4)



A family of curves  $r_K(\tilde{\nu})$  for **A** is shown in Fig. 2B. A spectral peak or shoulder due to transition  $i$  disappears from the linear combination  $r_K(\tilde{\nu})$  for  $K = K_i$  and the  $K_i$  value can thus be determined by visual inspection. The molecular point group of **A** is  $C_{2v}$  (Ahmed, 1980) and allowed vertical transitions must be polarized along the three symmetry axes  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$ , corresponding to excited states of  $B_1$ ,  $B_2$ , and  $A_1$  symmetry, respectively. Hence, only three different  $K_i$  values corresponding to  $K_x$ ,  $K_y$ , and  $K_z$  are expected. From the  $r_K(\tilde{\nu})$  curves in Fig. 2B  $K$  values close to 0.60 can be estimated for the features at 34,600, 39,200, 44,000 and 46,100  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ , and values close to 0.25 for those at 37,600, 42,900, 51,000 and 53,400  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ . As previously discussed (Andersen & Spanget-Larsen, 1997), the relatively broad band with maximum close to 27,500  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  ( $\sim 365$  nm) is due to two near-degenerate, differently polarized transitions; their  $K$  values cannot be determined directly.

The  $K$  values 0.60 and 0.25 must be assigned to  $K_y$  and  $K_z$ , corresponding to transitions polarized along the in-plane long and short molecular axes  $y$  and  $z$ . Under the assumption that absorbance polarized along the out-of-plane  $x$  axis is negligible in the present spectra, it is possible to construct the partial absorbance curves  $A_y(\tilde{\nu})$  and  $A_z(\tilde{\nu})$  indicating  $y$ - and  $z$ - polarized intensity (Madsen et al., 1992):

$$\begin{aligned} A_y(\tilde{\nu}) &= (K_y - K_z)^{-1} \cdot r_{K_z}(\tilde{\nu}) \\ A_z(\tilde{\nu}) &= (K_z - K_y)^{-1} \cdot r_{K_y}(\tilde{\nu}). \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

The curves  $A_y(\tilde{\nu})$  and  $A_z(\tilde{\nu})$  produced with  $(K_y, K_z) = (0.60, 0.25)$  are shown in Fig. 2C and in Fig. 3. They are shown on an expanded absorbance scale in Fig. S2, together with the isotropic absorbance curve  $A_{\text{ISO}}(\tilde{\nu}) = A_y(\tilde{\nu}) + A_z(\tilde{\nu}) = E_U(\tilde{\nu}) + 2E_V(\tilde{\nu})$ . The latter is equal to three times the absorbance that would have been measured in an isotropic experiment on the same sample. Six long-axis ( $y$ ) polarized features **B**, **C**, **E**, **G**, **H**, and **L** and six short-axis ( $z$ ) polarized features **A**, **D**, **F**, **I**, **J**, and **K** are indicated. Observed peak wavenumbers, absorbances, and polarization directions are listed in Table 1.

## Electronic transitions

The spectrum starts with a relatively broad band system with maximum close to 27,500  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (364 nm). The absorbance is predominantly long-axis ( $y$ ) polarized, overlapping weaker short-axis ( $z$ ) polarized intensity. The short-axis polarized absorbance **A** with maximum at 27,300  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (366 nm) can be assigned to the  $2^1A_1$  state computed at 27,900  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3). The computed transition is well described by promotion of an electron from the  $6b_1(\pi)$  HOMO to the  $7b_1(\pi^*)$  LUMO. The intense long-axis polarized band **B** peaking at 27,700  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (361 nm) is assigned to the  $1^1B_2$  state predicted at 27,700  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3). This transition is primarily due to the promotion from the  $4a_2(\pi)$  SHOMO to the  $7b_1(\pi^*)$  LUMO.

Band **C** with maximum at 34,600  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (289 nm) is purely long-axis ( $y$ ) polarized and is easily assigned to the  $2^1B_2$  state computed at 34,600  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3). The following absorbance band is resolved into two differently polarized components, **D** and **E** at 37,600 and 39,200  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (266 and 255 nm). They can be assigned to the  $3^1A_1$  and  $3^1B_2$  states computed at 38,600 and 40,900  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3). Band **F** at 42,900  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  (233

nm) is predominantly short-axis ( $z$ ) polarized and is assigned to the  $5^1A_1$  state predicted at  $43,200\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3). The band overlaps the onset of long-axis polarized ( $y$ ) intensity  $G$  around  $44,000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\sim 227\text{ nm}$ ). This feature is possibly due to the  $4^1B_2$  state computed at  $43,500\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3), but it may also involve  $b_2$  symmetric vibrational components of band  $F$ , gaining long-axis polarized intensity by vibronic coupling with the strong band  $H$ . In the isotropic spectrum recorded in  $n$ -heptane solution, transition  $F$  apparently corresponds to the shoulder close to  $43,500\text{ cm}^{-1}$  and transition  $G$  to the peak at  $44,300\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (Fig. S1).

Assignment of individual transitions in the high-wavenumber region is complicated by the presence of broad, overlapping bands and by a high density of electronic states. Our TD-CAM-B3LYP calculation predicts about 50 electronic transitions between  $60,000$  and  $45,000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (Data S1). In addition, the applied theoretical model may be less accurate in this region and the suggested assignments of observed features to computed transitions are necessarily tentative.

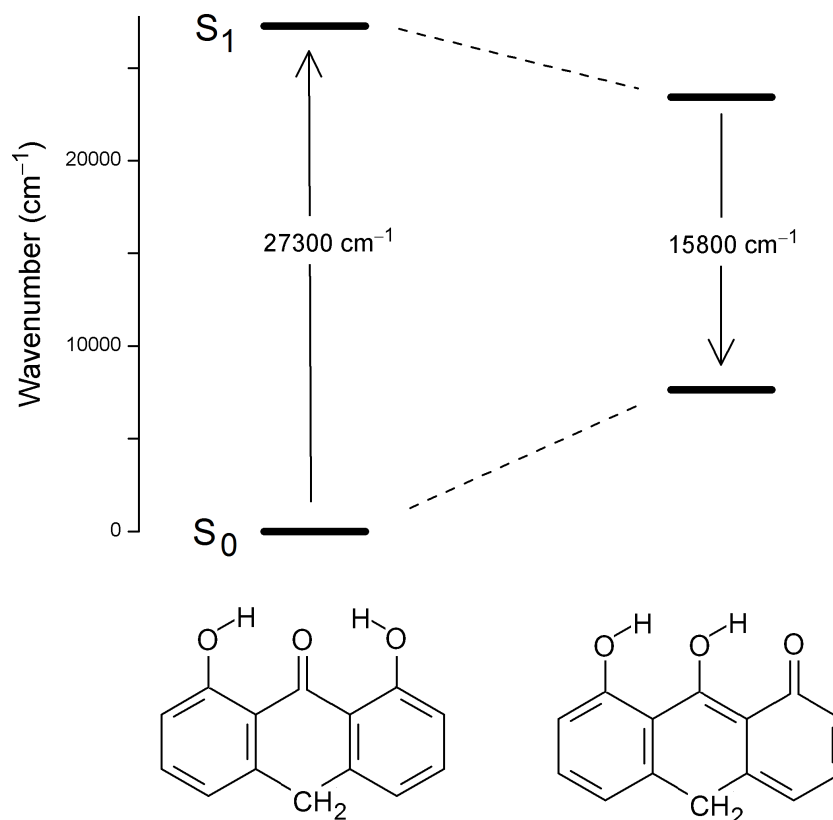
The observed long-axis ( $y$ ) polarized absorbance in this region displays a strong band  $H$  with maximum at  $46,100\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $217\text{ nm}$ ). According to the calculated transitions, this band can be assigned to the  $5^1B_2$  state predicted at  $47,400\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3). Band  $H$  has a long tail into the vacuum UV with an additional peak  $L$  at  $54,100\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $185\text{ nm}$ ). Several states are predicted to contribute to this absorption, primarily  $8^1B_2$  and  $9^1B_2$  computed at  $52,500$  and  $56,300\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (Table 1, Fig. 3).

The short-axis ( $z$ ) polarized intensity in this region is dominated by a very strong band  $K$  with maximum at  $53,400\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $187\text{ nm}$ ) in the vacuum UV. This is the strongest absorbance observed in the investigated spectral range. The peak  $K$  at  $53,400\text{ cm}^{-1}$  is preceded by two diffuse shoulders  $I$  and  $J$  at  $47,000$  and  $51,000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $213$  and  $196\text{ nm}$ ). Several states are predicted to contribute to this band system, such as  $7^1A_1$ ,  $8^1A_1$ ,  $9^1A_1$ , and  $10^1A_1$ , with transition to the  $9^1A_1$  state computed at  $52,800\text{ cm}^{-1}$  as the most intense (Table 1, Fig. 3).

### Excited state intramolecular proton transfer (ESIPT)

The observed fluorescence emission of **A** in  $n$ -hexane solution has a maximum at  $17,500\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $570\text{ nm}$ ) with an unusually large Stokes shift of  $10,500\text{ cm}^{-1}$  relative to the excitation observed at  $28,000\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $360\text{ nm}$ ) (Møller *et al.*, 1998). The fluorescence quantum yield is nearly independent of temperature which suggests that the decay from the initially formed excited state to the ground state does not involve barrier crossing (Møller *et al.*, 1998).

According to the orbital amplitudes in Fig. 4, the promotions  $6b_1(\pi) \rightarrow 7b_1(\pi^*)$  and  $4a_2(\pi) \rightarrow 7b_1(\pi^*)$  involved in the transitions to the two lowest, near-degenerate singlet states  $2^1A_1$  and  $1^1B_2$  are associated with substantial transfer of electron density from the phenolic moieties to the carbonyl group. This is expected to affect the balance of forces involved in the intramolecular hydrogen bonding, facilitating excited state intramolecular proton transfer (ESIPT) (Andersen & Spanget-Larsen, 1997). Geometry optimization of the excited  $S_1$  state with TD-B3LYP predicts barrier-less transition to the ESIPT product 8,9-dihydroxy-1(10H)-anthracenone, see Fig. 5, leading to good agreement with the observed fluorescence and excitation wavenumbers (the predicted excitation wavenumber indicated



**Figure 5** Predicted vertical excitation and emission wavenumbers for anthralin (A). On the left the predicted vertical transition from the ground state to the lowest excited singlet state is indicated, to the right the vertical emission from the photoproduct 8,9-dihydroxy-1(10H)-anthracenone (TD-B3LYP/6-31+G(d,p)). The predicted photoproduct is a result of barrier-less excited state intramolecular proton transfer (ESIPT). Further details are provided in [Data S2](#) and [Fig. S4](#).

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in [Fig. 5](#) is slightly different from the one listed in [Table 1](#) because of different TD-DFT procedures). The present TD-DFT results thus support the assignment previously suggested on the basis of semi-empirical model calculations ([Andersen & Spanget-Larsen, 1997](#); [Møller et al., 1998](#)). Excited state equilibrium nuclear coordinates and other computational data for the ESIPT product are provided as [Data S2](#); relative energies of this and additional excited state configurations are outlined in [Fig. S4](#).

A similar excited state rearrangement is observed for the closely related compound 1,8-dihydroxy-9,10-anthraquinone (chrysazin, an oxidation product of A) as reported by Smulevich and coworkers ([Smulevich et al., 1987](#); [Marzocchi et al., 1998](#)) and recently studied theoretically by [Mohammed et al. \(2014\)](#) and by [Zheng, Zhang & Zhao \(2017\)](#).

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study, polarization data for the anti-psoriatic drug anthralin (A) is provided by SRLD spectroscopy in the region 58,000–23,000 cm<sup>-1</sup> (170–430 nm), leading to the resolution of otherwise overlapping absorption bands and to experimental symmetry assignments of the

observed transitions. The results of the present TD–DFT calculations account admirably well for the observed polarization spectra throughout the investigated spectral range, allowing detailed assignments of about a dozen observed spectral features to computed electronic states. Assignment of the anomalous fluorescence of **A** to the ESIPT product 8,9-dihydroxy-1(10*H*)-anthracenone is supported by the present theoretical results.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND DECLARATIONS

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### Competing Interests

The authors declare there are no competing interests.

### Author Contributions

- Duy Duc Nguyen conceived and designed the experiments, performed the experiments, analyzed the data, authored or reviewed drafts of the paper, approved the final draft.
- Nykola C. Jones and Søren Vrønning Hoffmann conceived and designed the experiments, performed the experiments, contributed reagents/materials/analysis tools, authored or reviewed drafts of the paper, approved the final draft.
- Jens Spanget-Larsen conceived and designed the experiments, analyzed the data, contributed reagents/materials/analysis tools, prepared figures and/or tables, performed the computation work, authored or reviewed drafts of the paper, approved the final draft.

### Data Availability

The following information was supplied regarding data availability:

The raw data are available in the [Supplemental Files](#).

## Supplemental Information

Supplemental information for this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.7717/peerj-pchem.5#supplemental-information>.

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